

## The Battle of Pleasant Hill, Louisiana

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GEN. A. J. SMITH



GEN. N. P. BANKS



GEN. RICHARD TAYLOR, C. S. A.

# ANNALS OF IOWA.

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## THE BATTLE OF PLEASANT HILL, LOUISIANA.

BY S. F. BENSON.\*

It is said that the Battle of Pleasant Hill, April 9th, 1864, bears the unique distinction of an engagement from which both belligerents fled precipitately, and yet each party claimed the victory as soon as it discovered the flight of the other.

No one can thoroughly understand this great battle without considering the fighting of the previous day, the disasters of which had determined all this day's strategy.

Early in April, 1864, Maj. Gen. E. Kirby Smith, C. S. A., who controlled the military operations of the whole trans-Mississippi Confederacy, with headquarters at the little city of Shreveport, La., found himself threatened from two nearly opposite directions.

General Frederick Steele was approaching from the north with an army of some 15,000 men and two long supply trains, and at the same time Maj. Gen. N. P. Banks, with a splendid army of about 32,000 well disciplined troops was rapidly approaching by way of Red River, having with him a fleet of some fifty steamers, twenty-two of which were armored gunboats, mounting in all about 300 guns. Admiral David D. Porter of naval fame commanded the fleet.

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\*Solon F. Benson was born in Jackson county, Iowa, Nov. 20, 1839. His grandfather, Stutson Benson, then but twelve years of age, carried ammunition for the patriot soldiers at the battle of Bennington, Vt., Aug. 16, 1777, where the British were defeated and their general, Baum, killed. Young Benson was captured and taken to Quebec, where he would have been tried for treason but for the fact that he was in law "an infant," owing to his tender age. He reached home safely and in later years migrated westward and became a pioneer mill owner on the southern shore of Lake Erie. His oldest son, John Benson, came to Iowa in 1838, remaining for a time in each of the counties of Muscatine, Jackson, Delaware and Hardin. The son, Solon, was educated in the common schools and at Lenox College, Hopkinton, Iowa. He served two years in the 32d Iowa Infantry, losing an arm in the Battle of Pleasant Hill. During the past sixteen years he has been cashier of the bank of Piereson, Iowa.

The object of these expeditions was two-fold—first, to prevent the western armies from rendering aid to their brethren struggling with Sherman east of the great river, and second, to destroy, if possible, the Western Confederate armies.

They accomplished the first of these objects, but failed utterly in the second.

Everything gave way before the splendid army of General Banks, and his advance was rapid, successful and very orderly, until about the 5th of April he entered with high spirits upon that long overland march from Grand Ecore, near Natchitoches, to Shreveport via Spanish Lake, a distance of eighty miles, where all the way the land forces were separated from the fleet by the deep and impassable barrier of Bayou Pierre, which leaves Red River a few miles below Shreveport, and only returns to that river a few miles above Grand Ecore.

General Kirby Smith was of the opinion that Banks should be allowed to arrive in the vicinity of Shreveport before risking a pitched battle, but his field-marshal, Gen. "Dick" Taylor, was very strongly of the opposite opinion that this perilous portage offered the best possible chance to destroy the Federal army. And Taylor's insistence verged closely on mutiny, insomuch that he even threatened to march his army away into Texas if not permitted to fight the enemy at this juncture. He was further confirmed in his determination by the mistaken belief that all of the 10,000 troops loaned to Banks by Sherman were with the fleet, not having other means of transportation, while, as a matter of fact, only about 2,500 of them, the provisional 17th Corps, were detailed as an escort for the transports.

Believing, therefore, that Banks had but little more than half his force now under his immediate control, Taylor bravely offered battle at the little village of Pleasant Hill on April 3d. His offer, however, was refused, because at that early date none but the mounted scouts had advanced to that point.

Taylor then withdrew his army some twenty miles farther to the vicinity of Mansfield, and selecting a strong position at the Moss Plantations three miles below Mansfield, he sat down



like a grim watch dog, to wait the coming of the foe. As a sort of screen to deceive the enemy, he had left behind him a few cavalry regiments to dispute the way.

Without closing up his detachments, Banks pressed rapidly into the very teeth of the enemy.

He had now present for duty less than 23,000 fighting men, as follows: Two small divisions 13th Army Corps, Gen. T. E. G. Ransom, 4,500; First Div. 19th Corps, Gen. W. H. Emory, 5,300; detachment 16th Corps, Brig. Gen. A. J. Smith, 6,500; five brigades mounted men, Brig. Gen. A. L. Lee, 5,000; and of course the usual complement of artillery.

He had left the 2d Division, 19th Army Corps to garrison Alexandria, and had sent the provisional 17th Corps, about 2,500 strong, to protect the transports along the river. And his army had been not a little depleted by sickness and disability. He had with him, however, the "Corps de Afrique," or colored engineer brigade, numbering about 2,150, whose duties were to make roads, fortifications and bridges, but who were armed and could fight if necessary.

These detachments, with their two long wagon trains, being unnecessarily stretched out, covered the road for more than thirty miles, so that when the head of his column struck the enemy, it would require nearly two whole days to close up on the front.

About five miles beyond Pleasant Hill, and forty from Grand Ecore, on April 7th, the Federal cavalry under Brig. Gen. A. L. Lee, fell foul of the first outpost of the enemy, and a hot fight ensued in which the southern men had the best of it, driving rearward Col. Harai Robinson's 3d brigade, and compelling its two batteries to retire.

About a quarter of a mile to the rear, however, they were reinforced by Col. T. J. Dudley, in command of the 1st brigade of cavalry, and the enemy was routed, and the forward march resumed.

This little fight is known as the battle of "Wilson's Farm," and it cost General Lee sixty-two men, eleven of whom were killed. The enemy lost about ten or twelve. A little beyond this point is a small, sluggish creek or bayou,

known as "The Brushy," where one William Robertson then lived, and operated a small steam grinding mill. Here the surgeons gathered the wounded, took the family dining table for an operating table, and filled the Robertson home with the wounded, about fifty in number.

It was in the midst of this fight, and while Robinson's brigade was being driven rearward, that General Lee sent an orderly back to Gen. W. B. Franklin requesting that a brigade of infantry be sent him.

This little request, trifling as it may seem, appears to have been the beginning of trouble for the whole expedition.

Major-General Thomas is credited with the wise remark that the issue of a great battle may turn upon the loss of a linch-pin, and this arrangement seems to have been the proverbial linch-pin which wrecked the whole Red River Expedition.

General Franklin refused the request, saying that if the resistance was too great for the mounted force, the cavalry should fall back on the infantry, and not detach the infantry to be destroyed in detail. But the messenger who carried the request was not satisfied with General Franklin's reply, and appealed from Franklin to the General-in-Chief, N. P. Banks, who happened to be near, and General Banks imprudently reversed Franklin's orders, and directed him to send forward the desired brigade.

Franklin delivered the order to Gen. T. E. G. Ransom of the 13th Corps, who was in advance, and the 1st Brigade, 4th Division, 13th Corps, under command of Colonel (afterwards Brev. Brig. Gen.) W. J. Landram, by making a night march, was able to report to General Lee at daylight on the morning of the 8th.

One infantry regiment was deployed across the road with the cavalry on its flanks, and the forward march continued, the enemy resisting and picking off men with their excellent sharp-shooters.

The march was very rapid, and by noon the column reached the great Moss Plantations, about three miles south-







east of Mansfield. Ascending a little hill at this place, the army found itself unexpectedly confronted by a great battle line, extending as far as the eye could reach, with batteries, banners and guidons, all in position ready for a great battle.

The southern commander had drawn up his forces in a V shape, into the jaws of which the Federal troops had inadvertently marched.

Instead of retiring to a safe distance and awaiting reinforcements, General Ransom proceeded to arrange his line of battle, conforming to the angle of the enemy's line, a most dangerous arrangement, because, owing to this peculiar formation, either wing of the Federal army would be subject to a rear attack the moment the opposite wing could be broken by the enemy; and as the stage road, the only avenue of escape, ran nearly parallel with the longer leg of the "V," the right, the situation was extremely critical, and a strong central reserve would seem to be of the greatest importance. But Ransom had only the 1st Division at the front, about 2,500 infantry, supported by about 4,000 cavalry, and as the enemy extended his lines beyond Ransom's extreme flanks, Ransom placed all his infantry in line, depending on some mounted regiments for a reserve. This arrangement, of course, rendered the position quite hazardous.

The infantry occupied the apex of the angle, and the cavalry were dismounted and placed on the flanks, Lucas on the right and Dudley on the left.

The enemy's plan of attack consisted in massing a strong force on his extreme right, with intent to turn the Federal left (the shorter leg of the angle) which would imperil the whole Federal line.

For this important duty the splendid division of Maj. Gen. J. G. Walker, about 5,000 strong, was sent to the Confederate right, and to conceal the movement, General Mouton's division, about 2,500 strong, was flung with terrific energy against the Federal right center, while the mounted men guarded the Confederate flanks.

After a short delay the enemy began his charge, which was for a time nobly resisted. As the thunders of battle rose



higher and higher, the sledge-hammer charges of General Mouton fell heavier and still heavier upon the Federal right center.

Weakened by continual loss, the regiments at the critical point began to waver, and the enemy charged with redoubled fury. The men fought now with clubbed guns and with awful desperation, while the fate of the day swung doubtful in a trembling balance.

At this critical moment, Colonel Robinson charged in with his mounted brigade, and Captain Nettleton, commanding the 6th Massachusetts Cavalry, calling instantly on three squadrons, about one hundred men, fell like a thunder-bolt upon the almost victorious foe, and the fighting now descended to a literal butchery. In less than three minutes Captain Nettleton lost half of his men and thirty-six horses, and the N. O. Consolidated Crescents, C. S. A., were hurled back utterly discouraged with the loss of 64 per cent. of their men, and among them, seven color bearers had fallen in quick succession.

The line was temporarily restored, though an immense pile of mingled horses and men, marked the scene of strife, and the shattered regiments could scarcely hope to hold the bloody angle. And now General Ransom began the perilous task of calling off the regiments, while Mouton charged into the breach, capturing the 19th Kentucky bodily, and picking up an immense number of scattering men.

At this juncture General Cameron came upon the ground with the 4th Division, 13th Corps, about 1,800 men, and a new line was formed about one-fourth of a mile back from the first, but the new line was scarcely formed before it too gave way, and the day was lost.

General Banks had sent swift messengers back to Franklin, some nine miles in the rear, begging him for Heaven's sake to hurry forward, for the front was hard pressed, and now he rushed into the very thickest of the fight, to encourage his men; where the bullets flew thickest, there he might be seen, wearing his conspicuous Sibley hat, pleading with the men, and

even begging them with tears in his eyes to hold their ground just a little longer as help was very near.

But no human power could stay the tide of disaster, and the great battle line, once broken, fell slowly back, still fighting stubbornly, all its fragments converging toward the narrow opening where the road entered the great forest in the rear. At that point the cavalry train (157 wagons), and one hundred new ambulances, completely blocked the road, no precaution having been taken to get them out of the way, so confident had the train masters been in the success of the army. And all this train was even headed west, toward the battle line.

Of course the train could not be immediately turned without dire consequences, and an indescribable jam at once ensued. The drivers were all colored men, and the contagion of fear spread among them like wild fire, and the most horrible confusion followed. Wagons were overturned, mules tangled in traces, and the whole train soon overwhelmed by the retreating army from the front. The drivers cut the traces, mounted their mules, and abandoned everything, leaving the road simply impassable, and the enemy pressing from the front made large captures. One hundred and fifty-seven wagons, containing the cavalry supplies, one hundred new ambulances, and twenty-two pieces of artillery fell into the enemy's hands, including the Chicago Mercantile Battery, six Rodman guns, Orlando Nim's magnificent Massachusetts Battery, six guns, Klauss's Indiana Battery, four guns, and some small guns belonging with the cavalry. And that splendid army of more than 9,000 men, was now scattered in confusion along the road, and utterly useless for immediate service, and worst of all the confidence of victory had now passed to the Confederate banners, while the Union soldiers fled rearward with blanched faces, literally crushed with panic and despair, and some of the strongest men even sank to the earth utterly helpless.

General Emory's men had just halted for the night at the old steam mill on the Brushy, after a hard day's march, and they were preparing their evening meal when the long

roll sounded and they sprang forward at the utmost speed for the front. For over three miles they almost flew along the great stage road, and then they began to meet the first fringe of the great retreat.

In order to gather in all these stragglers, Gen. Wm. H. Emory detailed one company of the 161st New York on either side of the column, to be deployed in open ranks, with their guns carried horizontally in front of them, and with orders to stop all fugitives. For a little while this plan worked very well, but when the column struck the solid mass of the fugitives, these wings were swept away like cobwebs, one company returning to its own regiment and the other taking refuge in the 116th New York.

At this juncture General Banks appeared and directed Emory to form his battle line on the first favorable ground.

Arriving about that time at a little crest of hills overlooking a small creek near Chapman's Bayou, twelve and one-half miles from Pleasant Hill and four and one-half from the Moss Plantations, Emory began deploying his men in line of battle. By this time they were breathless and scattered far along the road, and it was no short task to close up on the front and deploy in line.

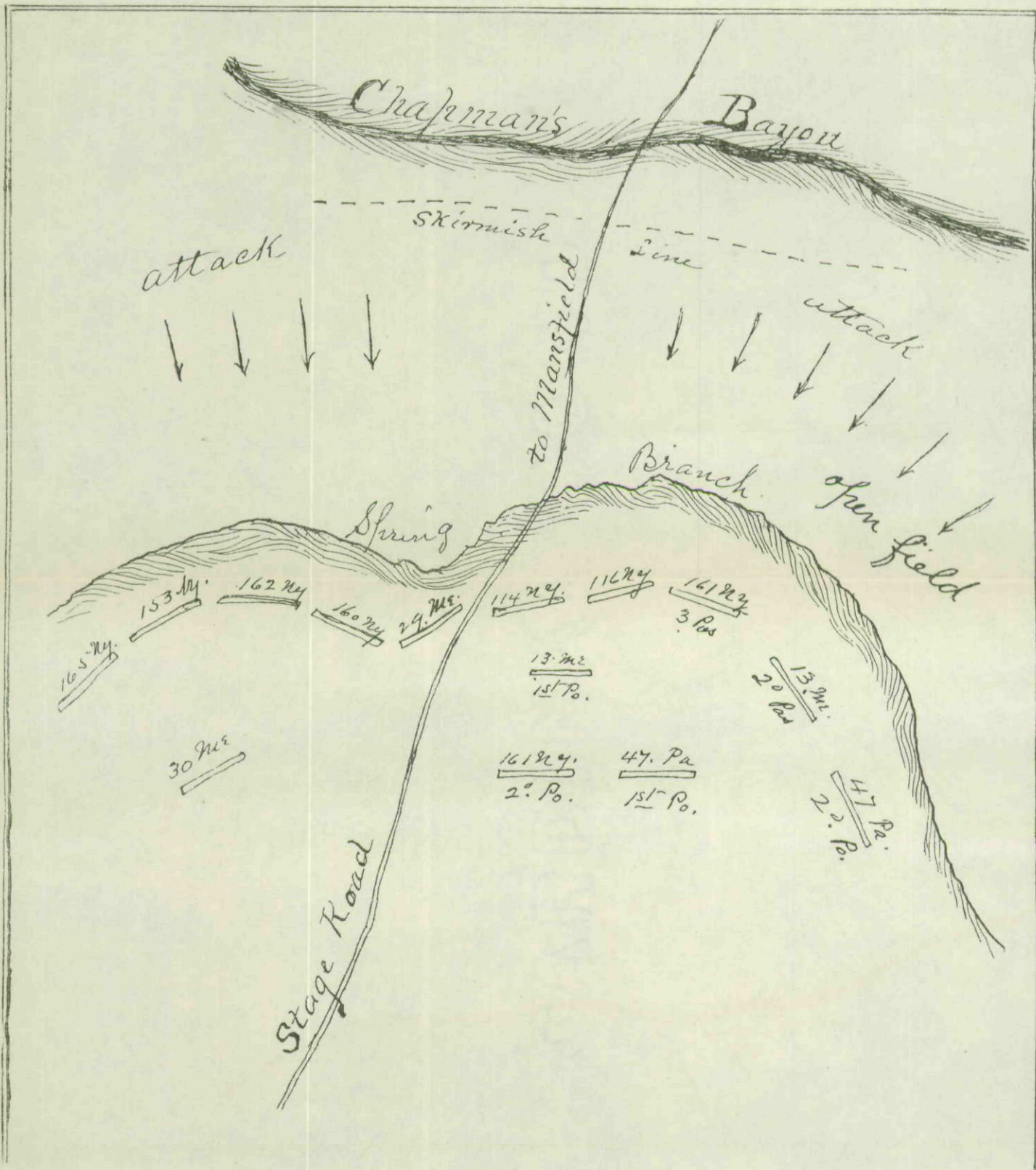
To gain a little time, Emory went forward about one-fourth of a mile with the 161st New York, and spread them as skirmishers across the road to receive the first shock of the approaching foe.

It is said that a wounded officer begged him not to risk this fight, as his entire command numbered scarcely half the army that had been destroyed but an hour before. But the old war horse thrust his sword into the ground and roared, "The Nineteenth Corps have never yet been whipped, and by Heaven they will not be tonight." And they were not.

Perhaps a sublimer spectacle has never been witnessed by mortal eye than this little band of heroes wedging their way into that frightful mass of panic stricken humanity.

To prevent the men from catching the contagion of fear before they even saw the enemy, the full brass band of the division was posted at the crossing of the road, the colors





MAP OF THE BATTLE-FIELD AT CHAPMAN'S BAYOU, APRIL 8TH.

All the regiments here shown belonged to Emory's Division, 19th A. C. The attack was delivered by Mouton's and Walker's Divisions, C. S. A.

planted there, and to the cheerful music of the band, the line quickly extended on either side, an opening being left for the fugitives to pass through.

Before the line was fully established the enemy descended upon the scene, swept away the skirmishers, and charged the main line. The 165th New York was not yet in line, and it was sent flying to the rear, chased by the exultant enemy for some three hundred yards where they rallied and driving back their foes, restored the line.

Behind this protecting wall of flesh and blood, the retreating fugitives paused with bated breath.

Marshall M. Clothier, of the 2d Illinois Cavalry, who had fled from the front with the panic stricken crowd, says: "These men fired by volleys, and the regular crash of those volleys, as they echoed through the pine forest, sounded to me the sweetest music I had ever heard."

General Taylor, on the Confederate side, was determined to overwhelm this command before reinforcements could arrive, and he flung his battalions upon it with the utmost force, and the fighting here was, by many, considered the severest of the day. But it was of short duration, for night soon closed the struggle, and the two armies lay down upon their arms, like two great watch dogs, ready to fly at each other at the first dawning light of another day.

In the rear, along the stage road, the officers of the 13th Corps built fires around which they proceeded to gather the remnant of their scattered forces.

There had been no Confederate cavalry in this evening's fight. When they were ordered to remount and follow up the retreating Union army, their horses were a mile and a half back, and before they could regain them and come to the front, the fight was over.

When the fighting ceased at night, a council of war was held, to consider the critical occasion. There was every indication that the contest would be renewed with great fury in the early morning. Very little dependence could be placed in the scattered army that had been beaten at the front, and the 16th Corps was fourteen miles away, and could not be brought



forward till this army might be utterly destroyed. The only safe plan, therefore, seemed to be to fall back, by a night's march, upon the 16th Corps—the army of Gen. A. J. Smith which after a hard day's march, had gone into bivouac about one and one-fourth miles east of Pleasant Hill, at what was known as “The Old Camp Meeting Ground,” where, within the old burial ground, some of the boys rested their tired limbs between the hillocks of the dead.

At Chapman's Bayou, Emory's tired and supperless men rested till midnight, when runners were stealthily sent among them to call them silently into line for the night retreat.

Twelve miles of marching in the darkness of the night, with Franklin's great train of 700 wagons, and the ruins of a defeated army to be gathered in as they marched, was no small undertaking, and before the march was accomplished the morning light had tinged the eastern sky.

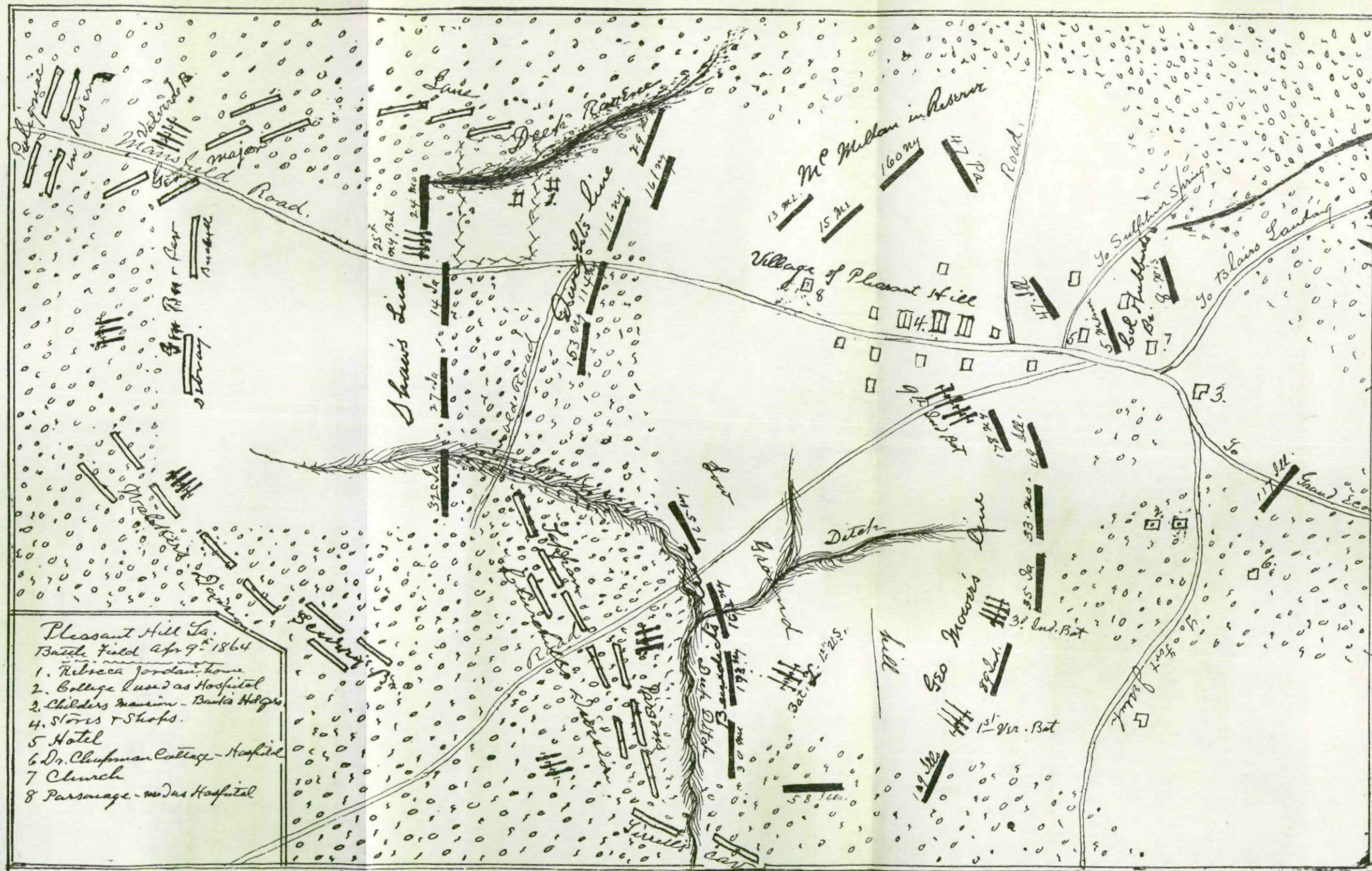
The enemy appears not to have discovered their absence till morning, when after shelling the woods where they had been, they sent their cavalry swiftly after.

Arriving at Pleasant Hill, Emory's command formed its battle line facing the enemy, the Second Brigade, McMillan's, in the center facing west, the First, Dwight's, extending on the right and rear, and the Third, Benedict's, extending far away to the left.

Just as the last of the column drew in, the enemy's cavalry made a dash upon the rear, sending a mass of stragglers and teamsters flying through the little village, and these overran the 153d New York Regiment, and for a moment quite a confusion ensued.

General Emory's division now formed a crescent with the convex side facing west, and Gen. A. J. Smith, coming in from the east, arranged his line in another crescent with the concave side facing southwest, and the horns of the two crescents hooking upon each other about the space of a brigade, and the two lines about a quarter of a mile apart. Emory's line was strengthened by the 2d Brigade, 3d Division, from Smith's corps, Col. Wm. T. Shaw's, and this brigade relieved McMillan, and thus occupied the center of the front line, Mc-





MAP OF THE BATTLE-FIELD OF PLEASANT HILL, LA.

The area here shown is about 2½ miles long east and west, by 1½ north and south. Union regiments are indicated by heavy black lines; Confederate regiments by two parallel lines. Geo. Mower's line, should read Gen. Mower's line.



Millan retiring into reserve over to the right of Dwight, and in the north part of the little town. A few regiments were thrown out to the east and north to guard against a surprise in that direction, and the army waited the pleasure of the foe.

It was not the intention of General Banks to risk a pitched battle here, but to hold the enemy in check until his great column could get well on its way toward Grand Ecore, where he hoped to unite all his force, and to rejoin the fleet. He had sent couriers to notify Admiral Porter of his new plans, and other couriers to apprise General Steele, but these last, after swimming Red River, fell promptly into the enemy's hands, and General Steele had to fight his way out as best he could.

Nearly four thousand mounted men, all the Engineer Corps and the remnant of the 13th Corps, some 2,500 efficient troops, had already gone on to Grand Ecore under instructions to make all possible haste, to burn wagons if they broke down en route, and to proceed to fortify their position at Grand Ecore with all possible dispatch.

When Colonel Shaw relieved General McMillan, in the center of the front line of battle, he (Shaw) advanced his line somewhat beyond his support on the right, and presently Colonel Benedict retired on Shaw's left, about one-fourth mile to the rear, to more open ground beyond the belt of timber. These two moves broke the line, and led ultimately to very serious results.

Shaw's line faced an old abandoned field, dotted over with small pines, and the great crescent in the rear covered all the open ground on which the little village stood. The battle-field extended two miles east and west and over a mile north and south.

The Confederate general, Hamilton P. Bee, was the first of the southern commanders to arrive on the new field, having with him only two regiments, Buchel's and Hardeman's. He sent these officers to the right and left to ascertain the extent of the Federal line, and they soon returned reporting that the line extended but a short distance to the left (the Federal right), terminating at a deep ravine, but extending over a mile in the opposite direction. He was much astonished at

such a display of strength, and gave up his intention of attacking with his two regiments.

The contingent from Arkansas and Missouri, 5,000 strong, under General Churchill, were not in the previous day's fighting; but were now making a forced march from the vicinity of Mansfield, and the Confederate general, Taylor, waited until two o'clock P. M. for them to arrive, and when they came they were so completely exhausted with their long march that he gave them two hours' rest before he would put them into action.

His plan was similar to that of the previous day. Churchill's command was sent far over to the Confederate right to turn the Federal left, while the mounted force, under Generals Bee, Major, Bagby and Lane, dismounting and turning their horses into a nearby pasture, made up the long left wing of his line, and General Walker's fine division of about 5,000 men filled in the center. Mouton's division, now under Gen. C. J. Polignac, the French Prince (since Mouton had been killed on the eighth), was placed in reserve in the rear near the Mansfield road.

Benedict's line now occupied very low ground along a little creek or ditch, with dense wood fringed with thick brush in his immediate front, and too near him for safety in case of a sudden attack.

Back of Benedict's line the rising ground sloped away to the east and north to the remoter crescent of Gen. A. J. Smith, and on the little swelling knobs of that open ground bristled the few batteries which the army could now command, pointing their black noses toward the sullen foe. Well toward the front of Smith's line, and very close to Benedict, was Battery L, 1st U. S. Regulars, and at intervals to the rear, the 1st Vermont Battery, and two Indiana batteries, the 3d and 9th.

One other battery, the 25th New York, four twelve pound steel rifled cannons, Capt. Irving D. Southworth in command, occupied a little swell of ground close beside the Mansfield road, and far out in the very front of the battle, and like a faithful sentinel, at intervals threw a shell far over into the opposite wood, where the enemy was supposed to be marshaling his commands.



Suddenly, about four o'clock in the afternoon, a puff of smoke shot out from the opposite cover far over to the right, and a projectile came screaming over gun No. 2, of the 25th New York. It was the Valverde, Texas, battery opening the battle. The guns of the New York battery replied instantly, and the thunders of an artillery duel rose, echoing among the pineclad hills. The New York battery was doing most excellent service, and the Valverde battery was getting badly hammered, when two more Confederate batteries, farther to the left, joined in the fray, and the air was filled with shot and shell. Just then a long line of mounted men issued from the opposite wood, and swept proudly across the great field. It was the Confederate brigade of General Bee, men from western Texas, splendidly mounted and thoroughly disciplined. As they covered the long interval between the two lines of battle, they made a most magnificent display. They seemed to believe the Federal line had turned tail and left the field, the battery having almost ceased firing, and all being still on our side. Shaw's line was not easily seen, lying close to the ground, and screened by the woods in their immediate rear. The New York battery fell back a little in the rear of the skirmish line, and the infantry held their fire for closer targets. When they had come very near, the infantry poured a terrible volley into that splendid cavalry parade, and it went to pieces like a house of glass. Not many were unhorsed, but all went rearwards in the wildest confusion.

Once within the shelter of the woods beyond the open field, they dismounted and returned immediately as infantry, and advancing upon Shaw's line, they poured volley after volley into his ranks. Our men believed they were fresh troops, and that the cavalry had been utterly destroyed. But every battle is essentially a series of illusions and this was one of them.

So long as the attack was pressed from the front, Shaw's position was impregnable, but when Major and Lane had wedged into the imprudent intervals he had left between his line and his support on either flank, his regiments were assaulted from the right flank, rear and front. Major Fyan of the 24th Missouri, on Shaw's right, became alarmed for the

safety of his command, and retired to the rear, fighting his way back with considerable loss. The 14th Iowa next became the target for the enemy's cruel cross-fire.

For an hour this went on. The roar of battle drowning every other sound, guns heated until it was dangerous to load, smoke covering the whole field until neither friend nor foe could be seen—and suddenly the whole scene changed. The firing partially ceased, and through the smoke of battle the men glanced anxiously about uncertain from what quarter the next disaster would come.

Churchill had now gained his vantage ground, as he thought, in the rear. And now for the first time, the noise of guns began to come from far over in the direction of Smith's great reserve crescent. But Churchill's guide had missed his mark, and landed Churchill directly into the focus of the crescent, instead of its rear. On low ground, within the left horn of Smith's crescent, lay the brigade of Colonel Benedict of the 19th Corps, and his skirmishers were nestled under cover of the deep ditch in his immediate front. Down upon these the Missouri troops descended with a running charge, catching them in the ditch, and mingling friend and foe in one common affray, and thus preventing the main line from firing lest they should kill their friends on the skirmish line.

Clubbing their guns they retired, fighting stubbornly, up the slope to the right and rear, toward the very center of the great crescent, dotting the bare hills with the dead and wounded as they went, and chased hotly by the exultant foe. They were driven through the 9th Indiana Battery, and through the 178th New York Regiment in Smith's crescent, and the havoc of battle now shifted into the little town itself, more than a mile from Shaw's front, while the southern men, taking possession of some of the buildings, opened fire upon the rear of McMillan's brigade, lying in reserve in the west suburb of town, and in Dwight's rear.

The great army of General Banks was now cut in twain; confusion reigned in its center, the guns of Battery L, except one out of six, were in the enemy's hands, and the whole left wing of the Federal army was in the greatest peril.

Banks now sent an officer to notify the women and children to flee for their lives, and hastily gathering their little ones, they ran out into the great forest, and only returned when darkness had closed the carnage around their homes.

General A. J. Smith, seeing the danger to the west wing of the army, sent an orderly to recall Shaw from his perilous position, but Shaw was just then very busy with the troublesome enemy in his immediate front, and being all ignorant of the disaster in his rear, and even of the foe sandwiched in between him and his nearby support, replied that he was too busy to go just then, but as soon as he could lick the Johnnies in his front a little more he would pull out. Presently he rode down along the rear of his line with intent to deliver the order for retreat, and came very near getting captured, and then he discovered the dismounted cavalry in his rear, and being unable to reach the left of even his own brigade, he left Colonel Scott, 32d Iowa, to extricate himself as best he could, and delivered his order to the other regiments.

At this juncture, Gen. Richard Arnold, Chief of Artillery, ordered the 25th New York Battery, in Shaw's front, to limber to the rear, and in doing so they, too, ran into the enemy in Shaw's rear, and reversing their guns, fired a volley rearward, and escaped through the opening thus made. Captain Irving, however, found four horses dead on gun No. 1, and had to spike and abandon that gun, though he afterwards pulled it off with the limber from the ammunition wagon, while the Johnnies captured his ammunition wagon, and he only recovered it at the Cane River fight, some days later.

The 24th Missouri, of Shaw's brigade, had already gone back, and Shaw got the 14th Iowa off in fairly good order, but the 27th Iowa had to run the gauntlet in wild confusion, and lost heavily in its escape, while the 32d Iowa remained out in the midst of the field without orders, and beyond the reach of Federal help.

The southern leaders now felt exceedingly jubilant, and they rushed past the 32d Iowa in quest of bigger game beyond, though some of their officers riding down in the belt of timber in the rear of that regiment, encountered several of the boys



in blue, whom they mistook for southern soldiers, and to whom they called, "Boys, go right to the front. Our men are driving the enemy on the right, and our victory will soon be complete."

General Dwight, seeing that the army on his left had apparently gone to everlasting smash, now threw two of his regiments, the 114th and 153d New York, across the road to his left, and Shaw's line being withdrawn, the dismounted cavalry of General Bee now charged in on Dwight's line, and in this charge they recovered their gallant Colonel Buchel, who had fallen shortly before and was, for a little time, a prisoner in the ranks of the 14th Iowa. He was mortally wounded, and died two days later in General Bee's camp.

It was now the climax of Confederate success. The whole battle had changed. Southern soldiers now stood where Shaw's line had been, and a great southern army filled the whole center of the field. But they had gone a little too far, and the tip of the crescent's left horn charged their right flank, and McMillan charged their left, and the whole line of Smith's great crescent, rising up from the ground like an apparition, delivered their fire, and with a great, prolonged cheer, charged straight at the southern line.

It was a splendid sight to look upon, this long line of blue upon the higher ground, undulating over hill and dale, with officers galloping at the head of the several commands, and with loud, long cheers, bearing down upon the enemy. To the southern men it was an appalling sight. They gazed upon it for just one moment, and flesh and blood could stand no longer, and turning tail, they ran hastily back to the protecting ditch.

Here they made a desperate stand, even driving back their assailants, on the left, but Smith's men, now joined by Benedict's men, paused not for an instant, but with grand old Joe Mower at their head went straight at them across the ditch, catching many of them by the shoulders and remanding them as prisoners, to the rear.

The same sort of panic now reigned in the southern ranks as that which had the day before destroyed the Yankee army at Mansfield. Backward they surged, trampling down their

comrades as they went, and rolling like a sea of brown along the roads west and southwest. And Walker's division, which was a little late, as usual with that general, came in just at the right time to be caught in the same disaster, his right, Scurry's brigade, being swept away in the tide of retreat, while his left, more or less broken into fragments, had paused to contend with the 32d Iowa, for General Walker himself had been carried wounded from the field. At this critical moment, Colonel Terrell, of the 34th Texas Cavalry, appeared on the extreme Confederate right, having been called, at the last moment from the far left to serve as flankers on the Confederate right. He had brushed up against Scurry's men, and exchanged shots with them, as he came, and his guide had made the same mistake as Churchill's had, and delivered him into the very heart of the disaster at the worst possible crisis. Terrell was a brave officer and a good fighter, and halting his command in the woods far south of the old college, he advanced into the open as infantry, where his little command was instantly swallowed up in the grand charge, and when his men, in much confusion, sought their mounts, they found them missing, and the Colonel believed the Arkansas troops had taken them to accelerate their flight, but they were, really, safe in the hands of the Indiana boys led by our Colonel Lucas. It is said that Colonel Terrell got lost in the woods and as the regiment went far back toward Mansfield that night, he was not able to join his regiment until late the next day.

Out in the far front, alone and without orders, Col. John Scott with the 32d Iowa, still held their ground, firing sometimes into the thick smoke in their front, and sometimes to the right, from whence a galling cross-fire came incessantly. The Colonel was greatly disturbed, and knowing that escape by the right flank was impossible, he called to his command, "Follow me," and ran rapidly to the left and rear, directly toward the great mass of southern soldiers that General Smith was rolling westward past his left. In the confusion and noise, only about half the regiment heard the command, and companies B, D, F, G and H were left scattered in fragments along the line. Colonel Scott and his little band were just in time to shoot



like a rocket between the Confederate mass and their pursuers, and Smith's men, mistaking them for a rebel charge, dropped on their knees to receive them with a volley. Colonel Eberhart (then Major), noting this peril, sprang upon a log and cried out, "*Thirty-second Iowa: Don't fire for Heaven's sake.*" The color-bearer waved his flag, and the boys ran in by the colors, with the utmost speed, making their grandest leaps as they passed through the line.

The fragments of the 32d Iowa which were still scattered along the old firing line, continued to fight in squads, resisting as they could, the southern men of General Walker's division, who were also in more or less disorder, each side capturing prisoners, some of whom were led rearwards, some taken off north along the belt of woods, and others presently released by the sudden return of their comrades. And thus, with countless vicissitudes these fragments went piece-meal to the rear, and after darkness had silenced the tumult, they rejoined their command.

The dismounted cavalry on the Confederate left had made but sorry progress, and finally General Taylor ordered Polignac's reserves into the fight, and as they charged in where Shaw's line had been, they struck Lane's men, now uncovered by Shaw's withdrawal, and poured a few red hot volleys into those unfortunate men. And now, as darkness settled down over the great battle-field, General Taylor called off his left, and they followed the demoralized right, as it fled backward along the great stage road, toward Shreveport, from whence they had come.

They had been driven from the field on their right, and had now retired on their left, while 800 of their men were prisoners in the Federal camp, and their medical director estimated their loss in killed and wounded at 1,500 men. Notwithstanding their arduous morning's march, these tired southern soldiers fled all the way back to Mansfield, except a few who bivouacked at the little Brushy.

The great battle was now over, and a council of war was held at Banks' headquarters, in the Childers Mansion, at the east margin of the little town, at which conference it was de-



cided to continue the retreat to Grand Ecore, and so at the hour of midnight, the Union army began their march eastward, leaving, in their haste, four hundred of the most badly wounded, some in the several improvised hospitals, and others scattered over the great field uncared for. Thus all night, both armies fled backward from the red field of battle, while the wounded on both sides remained looking with amazement upon this double flight. The Union loss was estimated at 1,000 men in all, four hundred of whom were left to languish in and around that little hamlet, while the dead lay scattered over the field unburied. Five surgeons and a very few attendants remained to care for the wounded, and the public buildings, the great Childers Mansion, and some other buildings were transformed into temporary hospitals, and filled to overflowing with the wounded. A camp near a country house two miles east of town received "the overflow."

The night after the battle, the 32d Iowa spent the whole night on the field, being selected for rear guard. The regiment had a few prisoners, and the boys generously divided their blankets with the prisoners, but in the excitement of the hour, forgot to set a guard over them. But the southern men, believing themselves well guarded, slept soundly, and were on hand the next morning for breakfast.

Night on a great battle-field is a wonderful thing. It was my good or bad fortune to remain long after dark on the field of carnage. As soon as darkness settled over the field, thousands of little fires sprang up where the firing had been thickest. Fires that only became visible as the darkness deepened, kindled most likely by burning cartridges, and the curling, wriggling smoke of these fires, mingling with the great volume of battle smoke, rendered the whole scene extremely grand, and as no one knew where the enemy might be, these luminous districts were easily mistaken for great camps, either of friend or foe, while in fact they were but vestal fires keeping their silent vigils over the wounded and the dead. The excitement of a great conflict, and the suspense of issues unknown served to magnify the spectral wonders of the night.

Though severely wounded, I walked along the firing line,

in the dim, uncertain flicker of the distant lights, hearing occasionally a groan from some wounded comrade, or stumbling over the prostrate form of another, while one by one stragglers and wounded joined my company, till some six or seven of us together sought a way out of the forest to some place of rest and help.

At the crossing of the little creek that ran through our line, we met a little band of men rapidly approaching us carrying their arms at a right shoulder shift. Suddenly they halted and challenged us, "Halt! who comes there." Nobody knew to which army they belonged. They might be a night guard going to their post, about a dozen in number. And on our side, for a moment not a soul dared answer their challenge lest we should draw their fire, and they were but a few paces from us. Then I replied, "We are only wounded men. Who are you?" And the answer came instantly, "Company H, 32d Iowa, Captain Benson." One of our fragments, still wandering in the woods.

All night the surgeons labored with the wounded, and when the bright Sabbath sun rose on the morning of the 10th, the army had disappeared, and that little town of less than one hundred souls found itself oppressed with seven times its number of wounded men belonging to both armies. And in their haste the army had taken away everything needed for the comfort of the men. There were neither provisions nor medical supplies.

At the southwest suburb of the little town stood a beautiful park of grand, spreading oaks, and a little farther south was the campus of the unfinished brick college, consisting as yet of nothing but the two great wings, two stories high, with an open space between, in which, some day, was to be erected the more important central edifice, but which in fact was never built.

These two wings were about 40 by 80 feet in size, with rough floors laid both above and below, and after three or four days' delay, were utilized as a hospital for the Federal wounded, except those in the country camp, and the Childers Mansion was then given up to the Confederate wounded, in accordance with the desire of its proprietress, Mrs. Maria Childers.



Four days after the battle, they sent us two big army wagons loaded with medical supplies, in charge of Dr. Sanger, medical director of the 19th Army Corps. Among these supplies were a great number of empty ticks for cots, and these being filled with raw cotton, made the men much more comfortable than the hard floors had been. The great floors were covered with these cots, and a shed being built for the Irish cook, a degree of order prevailed, though the few attendants were greatly overworked and the conveniences were very inadequate. But the rations were simple and easily prepared, consisting mostly of corn meal and coffee.

At Mansfield the several churches, and some other buildings were transformed into hospitals, and the Baptist church was burned by the upsetting of a tallow candle which fired the raw cotton used for bedding, the struggles of a soldier undergoing an operation being the immediate cause of the conflagration. The fire spread so rapidly that the men were gotten out with difficulty, and the building was a total loss.

Only a few southern men remained in that part of the country, those not in the Confederate army having fled to Texas with their colored "chattels," and being known as "refugees." But the kind-hearted southern ladies, who remained at home with their little ones, were frequent visitors at the hospitals, and generously supplemented the bill of fare with such delicacies as their slender larders afforded, for they, too, had been plundered by both armies, and were almost constrained to part with the widow's last mite.

To the wounded soldiers, enduring both captivity and pain, the coming among them of these gentle messengers of sympathy and mercy, was especially beneficent; and all the more so when it is remembered that all of them were true southern people, and in full sympathy with the southern cause, while we were in their eyes, their "Yankee invaders."

They piously refused all remuneration for the help they rendered, desiring that no mercenary motive should taint their notable charity. A dying officer, in our hospital, tendered his gold watch to Mrs. William Hampton, as remuneration for her constant kindness, but the lady promptly declined his generous offer.

Among these noble ladies, were Mrs. Stephen Chapman and her daughter, Miss Sallie, Mrs. William Hampton and her two daughters, Misses Mary and Sarah, and last but not least of all, Mrs. Bullen, who will be remembered by many old soldiers because her visits were abruptly terminated by a fall from the mule which the good lady rode from her country home, in which fall she sustained a fractured limb, and was attended by our Dr. J. E. Armstrong, one of the hospital surgeons. And a very chief among them all, Mrs. Maria Childers, mistress of the Childers estate.

Miss Mary Hampton may be called the heroine of the battle-field. She went all over the field on the morning after the battle, while the dead were yet unburied, the wounded not all gathered in, and the debris of the great conflict scattered everywhere. Especially touching to the feminine heart were the boyish red uniforms of the Zouaves, 162d New York, whose dead, like sacred roses, dotted all the long slope from the great ditch where Benedict fell, up to the crest of the hill on which stood the village of Pleasant Hill.

Sarah was known as the "curly headed flower girl," usually bringing a bouquet when she came.

When the conflict was raging at its highest, Mrs. Hampton, noting the levity of the young folks, admonished them that in such an hour of suspense they should be praying instead of laughing, at which the little daughter, Emma, replied, "O Landy, mamma! it's no use praying now, the Yankees have got us."

Mrs. Hampton is still living in the same little cottage which she occupied in war times, on her little farm about a mile south of the battle-field. But she is very old and infirm, totally blind and helpless.

Mrs. Childers, Mrs. Bullen, and Mrs. Chapman, have long since gone to their reward, but their children and grandchildren are scattered in that vicinity.

At the hospital in Pleasant Hill, I became acquainted with the Hon. Alonzo J. Barkley, now of Boone, Iowa, and Henry Nulton, Esq., now of Escondido, Cal. Both had, like myself, received severe wounds in the arm, near the



shoulder, the first necessitating an exsection of the bone, and the other an amputation.

Lieutenant John Devine, of the 32d Iowa, who with seventeen others had fought a lone battle with a fragment of General Walker's brigade, and lost a leg in the effort, was also there. It is his son, Dr. Edward Devine, who recently won such fame as to be appointed by President Roosevelt, to superintend the distribution of the Red Cross supplies in the ruined city of San Francisco.

The same Col. A. W. Terrell, who fought us there in command of the 34th Texas Cavalry, was made Minister to Turkey under Cleveland, and is now an honored member of the Texas legislature, and the author of several laws by which more than three millions of dollars have been appropriated for the education of the colored people of his state.

Of the four hundred wounded men whom Banks left at Pleasant Hill, more than half died in the several hospitals. Some five years after the battle the War Department made an attempt to gather the dead from all these battle-fields into the National Cemetery at Pineville, near Alexandria, La.

But the remains of only seventy could then be recovered, and none of them, so far as I have been able to learn, could then be identified.

The dead at Camp Ford, near Tyler, Texas, fared better in this respect, and it may be of interest to some friend, to know that the remains of Sergt. Joseph G. Miller, of Co. D, and private Nathan R. Modlin, of Co. F, both of the 32d Iowa, and who died at Camp Ford, are resting safely at Pineville.

Pleasant Hill is more of a plain than a hill. It was settled in the year 1844, by one John Jordan, and was called "Pleasant Hill" before any village was laid out, and because it was a pleasant looking place. This I learned from a son, John Tyler Jordan, who still lives in the vicinity, and who received his middle name because he happened to be born on President Tyler's inauguration day.

The old college, which in that day, served so beneficent a purpose, is long since gone, the east wing being burned

down, and the west being taken down brick by brick and sold. The village of Pleasant Hill went bodily to the railroad two miles southwest, and is now called by the road officials, Sodus, though retaining its old post-office name of Pleasant Hill. The forest has claimed much of the old abandoned battle-field, and rail fences traverse the old streets, while cotton and corn celebrate the "blood stained" fields.

The old Camp Meeting Ground, one and a quarter miles east of old Pleasant Hill, where the 16th Corps bivouacked the night before the battle, is now cultivated to corn and cotton to the very margin of the graves in its cemetery, while brambles, brush and tall trees dispute with marble shaft and slab the dwelling of the dead.

Everything is greatly changed, but the descendants of the former residents, who were mostly rich planters, are still living near by, and the little community is rich in treasured memories of 1864. And Mrs. Senator W. C. Davis, has one room in her beautiful home at Sodus, artistically garnished with relics from the battle-field of Pleasant Hill.

Memorial Day is celebrated every year at Mansfield on the anniversary of the battle of Mansfield, April 8th, and the event is emphasized by the long rows of buried dead from the battle-field, which their local cemetery contains.



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